

Colour My World. The Consumption Junction Meets D Digital Lifestyle

Scott Rickard

National Centre for Australian Studies, School of Humanities,
Communications and Social Sciences, Monash University, Victoria

Email: sric3@student.monash.edu

Abstract

Since the digital revolution of the 1990s the convergence of media technologies and organizations has been an ongoing challenge not only for those in the industry but also for consumers. Confronted by the choice of technology consumers wonder 'how do I choose'? This paper investigates the use of photography as part of home media in an era when the rise in personal communication technologies and individualism runs counter to the collective values within families. It considers whether digital photography and specifically the use of personal communication technologies such as camera-phones offer families a new way of communicating that increases their level of intimacy and sense of connectedness. Visual communication as a third level of communication shows families a way of looking at themselves that is not possible through voice or text communication. Camera-phones offer new possibilities in the construction of images for home media. Exploring the current transition therefore from film to digital from a user, technological and organizational perspective is integral to understanding the ways in which it might alter the generational communication processes and family dynamics.

Keywords: digital photography, families

Introduction

This paper is an introductory exploration of families and their use of digital photography as a way of connecting with each other. As part of 'home media' (Chalfen, 2002: 143) photography acts as a connecting device between family members because it assists everyone to remember each other, as well as places, events and points in time they shared (Böck, 2004; Rose, 2004). Home media is not about the consumption of mass media but rather the creation of 'images made by family members, generally at or near home, and for use at home in personal and home-oriented ways' (Chalfen, 2002: 143). There are those who think that photography in relation to home media is not worthy of consideration (Rose, 2004) but to do this is to ignore as Chalfen states 'that while half the world's population has yet to make a telephone call, peoples from virtually all parts of the world are either making or collecting personal photographic records of themselves' (2002: 143). These photo collections are a visual record of 'how they looked' (Chalfen, 2002: 142) as a family and an important way of increasing intimacy and connection between family members. Primary communication practice with digital communication technologies within families has centred on voice and text. Visual home media practices such as photography offer the possibility of a third layer in the connection between family members.

The second consideration of this paper is the family in its role as consumer and the complex intersection of the 'the consumption junction'. That is 'the place and time at which the consumer makes choices between competing technologies' (Cowan, 1987: 263 as cited in Oudshoorn and Pinch 2004: 4). There are two potentially competing technologies in relation to family photography, the camera-phone and a digital still camera such as a compact or SLR model. The increasing purchase of personal communication technologies such as mobile phones containing cameras (camera-phones)

adds to home media possibilities. In the past, family photography has centred on a collective device as the camera was once considered 'joint family property' (Riviere, 2005: 168). Increasing camera-phone take-up could alter these dynamics. The ability for all individuals in a family to take photos and to contribute to the family and the way it is seen (Böck, 2004; Chalfen, 2002) will change family dynamics.

However it is not only the number of cameras a family owns or who takes the photographs that is affected by digital photography. The key needs of any photographer - display, distribution and storage - also need to be catered for within families (Rose, 2004). Rose showed in her small study of twelve English middle class families, that these needs are central to family photography (2004). They assist in photography continuing to act as a connecting device between family members. This paper investigates what is known about usage patterns for these two types of cameras and how they might best meet the identified needs of display, distribution and storage for families (Rose, 2004).

Central to the migration or transition from analogue to digital technology, are the commercial organisations and products involved. While it has long been acknowledged that printed photo albums are part of family life, little discussion has ensued about their migration onto the World Wide Web. Online commercial photo services not only address the needs identified by Rose (2004) but also offer an electronic version of the printed photo album. This paper suggests that the role commercial online photo services play is not simply that of an online photo album service but rather is an important part in the appropriation, incorporation and conversion of digital photography within the family. The successful incorporation and conversion of a technology can in turn help cement and shape the future of that technology.

Generational Issues and their Effect on the 'Consumption Junction'

Within a family technology selection needs to be based on the skill level, accessibility and needs of the collective. The generational aspect of families potentially makes the consumption decision process more complex since each generation: youth, middle and elderlyⁱ, relates to different forms of technology and hence we can 'imagine the consumer as a person embedded in a network of social relations that limits and controls the technological choices that she or he is capable of making' (Cowan, 1999: 262). One of the criteria that Cowan believes helps users in the selection of a particular technology is that they do so based on which elements are most important to them and which are not too threatening (perhaps in terms of skills and operability) (ibid: 263).

Family studies define family as 'consist(ing) of two or more individuals of varying ages who are linked together over time through a matrix of intimate relationships' (Stovall Hanks and Ponzetti Jnr, 2004: 6) This definition could also be extended to encompass the view that 'family life is typically multigenerational in nature. These generational arrangements promote unique interpersonal processes that are very influential for the individuals who exist within the family context' (ibid: 6). It is these generational interactions and 'generational boundaries' (ibid) that make families a distinct user group.

ⁱ Rather than adopt marketing terms for generations, such as Gen Y or Gen X, this paper refers to the different generations as youth, middle and elderly following the language used by international and family studies.

A family can also be differentiated from a collective of individuals because each generation has specific roles within the family. As the family life cycle changes over time, an individuals' position within the family usually changes and of course with each transition, the needs of the family change (Whitchurch and Dickson, 1999). From a technological perspective, life cycle changes have an impact on adoption and usage patterns. This means that as the family changes, their preference for a particular type of technology and how it is used may alter.

This can be especially difficult when there is more than one generation living within the one home. A generation as defined by Mphande is 'a single stage in a family history' which results in a generational gap between youth and elderly because of a difference in attitude and experience (2004: 155) or as Osgerby describes it, 'distinctive social experiences, values and behaviour' (2004: 8). This gap is important when examining technology because it has resulted in the different generations bonding with different technologies simply because of their exposure to that stage of technological development (Lim and Tan, 2003). This bond between a generation and a particular technology may be strong enough that when a change such as that between film and digital occurs it may take quite some time for the generation most used to using that particular technology, for example the elderly, to adopt the new version. Then when it is adopted, they may select a brand and model that another peer or family member owns simply so that they can access help readily when assistance is needed (Millward, 2003). For an older person the consumption junction may be as simple as choosing between brands and models with the bewildering array of features available, rather than always a larger leap between a stage in technological development such as analogue or digital. This means that when we are considering the sociological stance of shaping technology and trying to understand communication practice between the generations then we also need to consider the generational position within the technological development cycle.

Generational uptake of particular technologies is difficult to determine because it depends on a number of socio-economic factors: age, income, skill (Chen and Wellman, 2003; McLaren and Zappala, 2002; Millward, 2003; Norris, 2001; Rice and Katz, 2003) life stage (Chen and Wellman, 2003; Millward, 2003) which is further complicated by gender (Anyanwu, 2004; Byrne and Findlay, 2004; Clark, 2003; Cowan, 1989) and usage motivation particularly among the elderly (Harwood, 2004; Millward, 2003). While youth are generally accepted as the generation most likely to use a mobile phone (APS, 2004, Dobashi, 2005: 222; Ling, 2001) followed by adult males (Lemish and Cohen, 2005; Ling, 2004), older people such as elders are the least likely (Rice and Katz, 2003). Grandparents or the elderly are the most likely to still be using film cameras because of the 'socio-digital divide' (Lim and Tan, 2003: 99). This technological divide affects the family unit by straining relationships between generations. For example, Lim and Tan cite one grandparent as being unable to complete the most basic of tasks such as changing television channels using the remote control (ibid). If a grandparent were to upgrade to a digital camera then there would be new skills to learn for storage (media cards or computer), print (using a kiosk, computer and printer, and internet) and distribution (computer and internet) as well as more technical innovations and features with which to become familiar. Millward notes that often new technologies such as the Internet are not adopted

because the elderly perceive themselves as 'too old to use (the Internet)' and would rather express a lack of interest than admit to not being able to use the technology (2003: 12).

Domesticating the Digital Camera

Prior to and at the point of purchase, consumers consider what is important to them in 'incorporating' the purchase into the domestic sphere. This point of decision making is known as 'the consumption junction' (Cowan, 1987: 263 as cited in Oudshoorn and Pinch 2004: 4). It is important to remember that the technology about to be purchased is to enable greater communication with their family and friends (known as conversion). At this junction, generational aspects play an important part as do additional products and services that could be used with the particular device. Additional products and services such as online photo services not only assist a family to incorporate their digital camera into the home, but they are also increasingly encouraging home photographers to be independent.

An important change in this transition phase is the independence given to photographers through digital photography. The analogue (or film) pattern of family photography was to shoot photos then take the film along to a local shop in the high street for developing and printing. Prints were collected and sometimes enlargements were made of particular photos to be displayed in a frame or album. Additional prints were also made from time to time to distribute to other family members such as grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts. Digital technology changes this pattern. All the developing and processing can be done within the family home. Photos are shot on the digital camera. Images are uploaded via a media card or USB connection to the family computer. They can be stored there, burned to a CD-ROM or uploaded to the Internet for storing. Small alterations such as red eye reduction, cropping, and image resizing can all be done by the digital photographer at home on their computer. Software such as Adobe's Photoshop Elements is provided by camera manufacturers to purchasers of digital cameras. This specialty software is a condensed version of the professional package. It provides home photographers with the flexibility of correcting small errors at home rather than in-store. Most importantly for families, prints can also be made directly from the family computer if a printer is located within the home. While digital technology provides photographers with a greater degree of independence, this independence however, does rely on the user being comfortable with operating the technology. It also requires time and skill of the user to learn the different supporting software packages.

This independence not only shapes the changing patterns of development and processing but also affects the way in which photos are displayed and distributed. Digital photos are easy to distribute via email, instant messaging, or hardware devices such as CD-Rom or USB. Alternatively their electronic format also enables them to be uploaded to a family web album. On the web, photos are able to be displayed and distributed simultaneously. The key advantage for families is that commercial online photos services offer a way of connecting which is flexible, independent and accessible. In line with arguments about old media versus new media, it could be argued that online photo galleries and web albums are simply an electronic equivalent to their printed counterparts. However, the significance of commercial online photo services such as Snapfish and Shutterfly goes beyond this simple comparison. Members of commercial online photo services are offered not only the three aspects which Rose

identified as important to families with film cameras; storage, display and printing (2004) but most importantly these services are offered within an environment which promotes greater possibilities for interaction.

Firstly, the environment of a commercial online photo service is neutral. For families who are less physically or emotionally close, a neutral environment offers a level of accessibility to family. Secondly, family members are able to leave comments about individual photos in web albums. Comments are listed near the photo and are simply a brief sentence with the identity of the author automatically attached. For most services, authors must be members of the service to be able to leave a comment. Comments left can reflect the traditional story telling that occurs when family members are present as a group. However, in a neutral environment people are able to choose whether they want to leave or read comments. Most importantly, these comments are there for all family members to read not just those physically present at the time. Private comments can be sent directly via email or instant messaging to the photographer if necessary. Thirdly, with digital photos family members can choose their own preferred photos to print rather than have the photographer select for them. They can also choose the type of printing service. Online photo services offer a range of personalized merchandise such as coffee mugs, t-shirts, coffee table books, and invitations all created using members photos. These are popular as gifts for family members. This service also, most importantly, removes the need for individual members to create hard copy photo albums or distribute prints to family.

It should be noted that there are five different types of online photo album services. The first type for purposes of classification I refer to as personal websites. Families may choose to build their own photo album as part of a family website which is hosted on either a family domain or free hosting service such as Yahoo!'s recently purchased www.flickr.com (Hansen, 2005). The second are independent services such as www.shutterfly.com. The third are sites affiliated with camera stores such as Ted's Camera Store (www.teds.com.au), the fourth type are sites affiliated with product manufacturersⁱⁱ such as Kodak (www.kodakgallery.com). The final type is services affiliated with a telecommunications company such as Vodafone NZ (www.pxtworld.co.nz). Within this paper commercial online photo services refers to online stores who offer their members not only hosting but also additional services such as photo storage and merchandise. At this stage in the transition there is a crossover between types which fit this category. For example, www.kodakgallery.com a product manufacturer site, www.shutterfly.com an independent service, and www.teds.com.au offer various levels of these services to their members.

Online photo services are obviously delivering services needed by their members since membership of online photo services has dramatically increased from 10 million in 2000, doubled in 2004 and was expected to reach 26 million in 2005 (Caplan and Newman, 2005). The three main USA commercial operators, Snapfish, Shutterfly and Kodak EasyShare make up 75 per cent of the \$US241million industry (ibid). Secondly, online photo services such as Snapfish can not be simply viewed as commercial enterprises without taking into consideration their ownership and partnership agreements. For example, since 2005 Snapfish have been owned by Hewlett

ⁱⁱ Inclusive of traditional film, printing, and phone manufacturers

Packard (Wireless News, 2005) and now have partnership agreements with retail stores, Walmart (TechWeb, 2006) and Publix (Photo Trade News, 2006) in the United States. The interconnectedness of these relationships that is the online photo services and their allegiances with the traditional film manufacturers, Kodak and Fuji, as well as existing relationships with associated organizations such as Hewlett Packard and major retail chains should not be overlooked. One way of viewing these networks and interconnections would be to consider Cowan's suggestion that technology is sometimes developed in order to 'salvage a declining business' (Cowan, 1999: 275). Considering this in detail is outside the scope of this paper however this may be one of the reasons that HP purchased Snapfish, especially as the 'domestic is, plausibly, becoming a crucially important economic site' (Silverstone, 1991: 6). All of these organizations are increasingly offering families a way of 'domesticating' digital camera technology through their products.

Families as Camera Users

Firstly it is important to note that this paper, like Chalfen's research in the 1980s, centres on 'ordinary people' who 'do photography in periods of leisure' and who are 'not serious in the *art* of photographic representation' (Chalfen, 1982: 12). They take photos because they act as memory prompts containing information that is meaningful to them (Chalfen, 2002: 142). Photographs shot by families about family life fall into two categories: formal and candid. Family photographs shot at family celebrations such as birthdays, weddings, and on holiday are normally formally posed and act as 'photographs-as-memory' (Riviere, 2005: 175). In these photos we expect to see groups of people clustered together, often posed against an easily recognizable backdrop. In contrast to these formally posed shots, candid shots are photos that often capture moments in family life that are also considered memorable. These may be simple shots of babies sleeping, toddlers walking, or mum feeding the child. For the mothers who feature in Gillian Rose's research taking large amounts of candid photos of their children is important to them and not uncommon (Rose, 2004).

Identifying these two types of photos is important because as technology changes the question arises whether families will adopt the new technology offered or adapt their needs. Currently the photography market supports three models of digital camera; digital SLRs, compacts and camera-phones. Yet, it should be noted that even within these three models there are huge variants in cameras. It is suggested in this paper that the three different types of cameras fulfill different roles depending on the photographer. For example, prolific photographers are most likely to use a digital SLR for formal and art shots, a compact for candid shots and a camera-phone for candid and spontaneous shots. This is largely determined by the reason behind the photo being shot and by which camera is in their possession at the time. Each camera has limitations of which a regular photographer quickly becomes aware. So while it is possible to take all types of photos on all three camera models the results can differ widely. The camera-phone is the newest form of camera adopted by the family and the following discussion considers how this new technology challenges their established norms.

Camera-phones are commonly used for the third type of photo, 'spontaneous photos' (Sprint, 2005). They are typically snapshots or candid shots and while they are able to be printed and distributed like other photos they are also more likely to be sent via the mobile phone. They are not

necessarily the type of photos that people will store, print or display. They are fun photos taken spontaneously simply for instant distribution. For example www.nzgirl.co.nz provides insight into how to keep parents happy using picture messaging. They suggest daughters send parents a 'pvt of your home-cooked meal or tidy bathroom... ideally keep a gallery of tidy house shots after a cleaning spree for future ammo' (Tee, 2005). Spontaneous photos could be used for connecting between family members in the same way that some academics suggest people connect using SMS or email (Liechti and Ichikawa, 1999: 187). That it is 'the message by its mere transmission that *connects* the sender to the recipient' (ibid). Here the significance in the type of photo is more in how it is used to build intimacy between family members than its content.

From a technological perspective the basic camera features in a camera-phone are not dissimilar to other models of digital cameras. The advantage of camera-phones over existing cameras lies in their flexibility as a converged device. As a converged device, the likelihood of possessing a camera when you most want to take a photo is increased. Camera-phones are now globally surpassing numbers of film and digital cameras combined (Newton, 2006). Secondly they offer the most flexible and instant method of display and distribution. Phone-tographersⁱⁱⁱ are able to shoot photos and store them in their camera-phone or to distribute via MMS. Unlike current prosumer models of digital cameras there is no need to wait until the photographer can access their computer to upload images. Thirdly a camera-phone adds a different level of personalization to the mobile phone by using photos taken with the camera. For example a camera-phone can shoot and store images as part of a display gallery, background image, or add the photo into the contact details for that person. When someone calls a mobile phone the telephone number of the person calling and their photo (if recorded in the contact section) appears on the screen. Finally, a gallery enables phone-tographers to share their photos with friends and family when visiting them in person (Okabe, 2006: 189). The camera-phone screen acts as the display mechanism and photos stored in the camera-phone gallery are able to be viewed individually. Some camera-phones^{iv} even offer more sophisticated features such as zoom, rotate and full screen which assists in display. The flexibility to act as an electronic photo album, coupled with contact photos, potentially increases the level of connection between people and helps to incorporate the technology within the family unit.

Concluding Thoughts - Towards a Digital Lifestyle

Current research into camera-phones by organizations such as InfoTrends and Snapfish, predicts that 'for many consumers, the camera-phone will be their everyday camera' (InfoTrends, 2006). Businesses have taken note that these consumers are 'willing to pay more for their handset; tend to take, share, and print more pictures with their camera-phone; and spend more per month on wireless services' (ibid). Businesses will therefore spend more time developing additional products and services to encourage and assist their consumers to do just that, print, share and distribute their photos. After all, the digital lifestyle is conducive to change from the traditional 'capture and print' model to a 'manage and share model' (Hayes, 2006).

ⁱⁱⁱ People who take photos with their camera-phones (Sprint, 2005)

^{iv} For example the NOKIA 7210

The 'manage and share model' suggested by Hayes (2006) supports the independence gained by home based digital photographers. It allows them to literally manage their own photographs and provides flexibility for storage and distribution. It could be argued that the camera-phone is the best example of 'manage and share'. Phone galleries, spontaneous photo taking and instant distribution are key advantages that camera-phones have over compact and SLR models. Camera-phones have their own inbuilt distribution through Internet connectivity and until last year when Nikon, Canon and Kodak released wi-fi enabled digital still cameras into the US (Scoblete, 2005), it had not been possible with still cameras. It should be pointed out that until the take-up rate of these wi-fi enabled still cameras increases and the point of critical mass of users is reached (Armstrong, 1998) then this form of digital camera technology is still early days for most families.

This is why exponential growth in family usage of camera-phones could occur. Mobile phones are already well established within Australian society as an everyday method of communication for not only voice, but also SMS. Sending photos with txt and responding is already in practice by some Australians. It only needs greater widespread adoption and acceptance to become common practice. Users need to possess a phone capable of such actions, purchase an appropriate telecommunications plan to send MMS and lastly have the skill to use the phone to take a photo, attach a message and send. As mentioned earlier in this paper the adoption of particular types of technology by particular generations could be one of the greatest barriers to the uptake and widespread practice of MMS as a way of distributing family photos. However, learning to operate a camera-phone it could be argued is simpler than that of a digital still camera. Combine the easier operation, the cheaper price, and greater flexibility as a converged device and it makes a popular choice for families wanting to maintain visual contact.

This is not to say that the transition for all from analogue to digital is positive. There will necessarily be an adjustment period. In fact in some instances there has been resistance (Van Dijck, 2005: 312). Van Dijck discusses a personal account of her friend's offer to transfer his family's collection of private documents into electronic format only to encounter resistance. His relatives 'expressed their attachment to the touch and feel of analogue products' (Van Dijck, 2005: 312). This mirrors Roses (2004) discovery that her participants like to touch and feel their photographs on display. This resistance could be generational as discussed in the body of the paper. For example, the current generation of youth are used to a fully digital environment whereas their grandparents (or elderly) are less accepting and use different technologies from their grandchildren (Lim and Tan, 2003). It is possible that as the use of camera-phones increases we may see a general acceptance that photos shot for memory keeping are printed and those taken spontaneously are ephemeral and stored electronically, if at all.

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